DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 191 930 UD 020 726

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TITLE Rastafarianism, Reggae and Racism.
PUB DATE [77]
NOTE 26p.: Print quality occasionally poor.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Youth: Economically Disadvantaged: Economic Factors: Foreign Countries: *Music: *Racial Bias: Racial Discrimination: *Religious Cultural Groups: *Social Influences
IDENTIFIERS *Great Britain: Jamaica: *Rastafarianism: Reggae

ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the relationship between Rastafarianism and black youth in Great Britain. Rastafarianism is considered from three main perspectives: (1) the social, economic, and historical context of the movement's development among poor blacks in Jamaica since the 1930's: (2) the evolution of Reggae as the musical expression of Rastafarianism, and the music's role as a disseminator of the movement to young people in Great Britain: and (3) the experiences of blacks in British society, with its historic and current racist structure. It is held that, for economically disadvantaged black youth, Rastafarianism is the only social reference point that gives positive reinforcement to the black identity. It is also suggested that the youths' political insights, knowledge of Reggae, and articulate expression of their knowledge should be integrated into the curriculum of multiracial schools. (Author/MK)

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Published as a booklet by the National Association for Multi-racial Education (copies available from Madeline Blakeley, 23 Doles Lane, Findern, Derby. Price 30p inc. p + p).

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RASTAFARIANISM, REGGAE AND RACISM

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FOREWORD

This booklet derives from a much larger research project which I carried out at the Centre for Mass Communication Research, University of Leicester, between October 1975-October 1977. This was called The Significance of Reggae Music in the Lives of Black Adolescent Boys in Britain: An Exploratory Study. It would seem, therefore, only fair to acknowledge not only those who assisted in the preparation of this booklet, but also those 'significant others' who contributed advice and help to the larger study. I would like to thank Peter Golding, Paul Hartmann and Robin McCron of the Centre for Mass Communication Research, Charles Husband of the School of Social Work, Leicester University, Ivor Morrish of La Sainte College of Higher Education, Southampton and Dick Farley of the Faculty of Education, Trent Polytechnic. In addition, my thanks go out to the headteachers, staff and pupils who co-operated in the empirical stage of the project. As promised, I have not revealed the names of either the schools or the pupils; the names used in this booklet are pseudonyms.

For the use of lyrics in the booklet I thank Island and Virgin Records.

Chant and Brothers in Trouble : Lyrics from V2088 'Rasta' by Delroy Washington

c Virgin Music (Publishers) Ltd 1977

Available Virgin Records

Marcus Garvey : Island Music Ltd

Let Jah arise and let His love
Be with I and I everlasting,
Jah Rastafari.
Jah Rastafari is Father of all nations
Jah, Master of all tongues and languages,
Let Him be praised

CHANT : Delroy Washington 1977

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion. For there, they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

Psalm 137

INTRODUCTION

The Rastafarian movement, which emerged during the early 1930s, remains an enigma. Because of the absence of any clearly defined beliefs or any central ideologue to guide the direction of the movement it remains both fragmentary and diffuse, with members constantly providing their own idiosyncratic interpretations of what Rastafarianism demands. Even the central belief of Repatriation to Africa, and to Ethiopia in particular, is subject to various revisions. For some, 'Africa' is defined at its literal level and these followers refuse to participate in any society beyond Africa. They consider that they are being kept captive in 'Babylon' and their withdrawal from both political and economic activities in 'Babylon' takes place in anticipation of the Day of Deliverance when they will return to Africa - Zion. Conversely, some Rastamen vehemently believe that 'Africa' can be defined in a more metapherical sense and what it symbolises for the black can be achieved through their active participation in 'Babylon'. In the same way, some Rastamen insist on going 'locks-up' (the distinctive plaiting of long hair) to signify their hardships whilst in captivity and their determination to escape. Others consider the locks peripheral to their Rastafarian beliefs. These diverse and often contradictory explanations of the Rastafarian philosophy make any analysis of the movement problematic as no generalisation can ever have universal application. As a result, most commentators on Rasta are resigned to the fact that

Rastamen form a collectivity rather than a coherent body. The Jamaican sociologist Orlando Patterson, summed up this view in 1964 when he wrote:

> The Rastafarians are a highly disorganised group. Indeed, it is not possible to speak of them as one group, but rather a loosely-connected proliferation of semi-formal gatherings, having certain common beliefs, attitudes and expectations. (1964: 16)

Of course, the recent transposition of Rastafarianism from its Jamaican roots to the British context has brought with it increased problems of definition and interpretation. Not surprisingly, those members of the white population who are in closest contact with black youths in this country - teachers, social workers, police and probation officers - face the dilemma of deciphering the relevance of Rastafarianism and the significance of the youths' attraction towards it. Can it be considered a religion? Is it a cogent expression of black political consciousness or may it be dismissed as a passing youth style which, like the Teds, Mods or Rockers, will rapidly evaporate? Unfortunately there are no simple, clear-cut answers to these questions, and this booklet can only offer a partial account of how youths in Britain perceive and respond to Rasta. The levels of commitment which can be observed are as diverse as the movement itself. Whilst for some the attraction of adopting Rasta symbols, emblems and language is in keeping abreast of current fashions, others consider the movement as symbolically representing their discontent with their actual social situation in contemporary Britain. By promoting the black identity, Rastafarianism inverts the norms and values of a racist society. Blackness becomes a <u>positive</u> rather than <u>negative</u> attribute.

The aims of this booklet are manifold. Although it is primarily concerned with the relationship between Rasta and black youth in this country, this theme cannot be examined in isolation; there are a number of subsidiary topics which need to be considered if this relationship is to be placed in its true perspective.

Our initial concern must be to focus upon the development of the Rastafarian movement and philosophy since its emergence in Jamaica during the 1930s. To understand Rasta it is necessary to understand the prevailing social, economic and political conditions in Jamaica and, in particular, West Kingston, which both threw up the movement and provided it with its most substantial and enthusiastic support. From this we may then proceed to examine the intimate association between Reggae music and the Rastas and consider the crucial role which Reggae assumes in disseminating the Rasta philosophy to a larger and more widespread audience than it might otherwise have reached.

The examination of these two themes should help to clarify the impact of the Rasta philosophy on black youth in this country; but it does not provide us with the complete framework for analysing this impact. Rastafarianism, however defined, is a radical social movement based on the premise that the existing social relationship between blacks and whites should be reversed. When this aim has been achieved, 'Babylon' will be transformed into 'Zion' (regardless of the precise geographical location of this upheaval). This is a basic Rasta belief and like other aspects of the philosophy its inevitability can be confirmed by Rastamen through their careful scrutiny of the bible. Thus Isiah 14: 1-2 is referring to the Rastas - the real Jews:

> The Lord will have compassion on Jacob and will set them in their own land and aliens will join them and will cleave to the House of Jacob. And the people will take them to their place and the House of Israel will possess them in the Lord's land as male and female slaves.

To be attracted towards a movement which identifies grave injustices for blacks in the existing social order, the youths themselves must be both disillusioned and dissatisfied with their own present social situation. Thus it is necessary to focus on racism in Britain and to illustrate how deeply entrenched in British mainstream society racism has become.

The youths' predilection towards Rastafarianism will therefore be considered from three main perspectives :

1. The emergence and development of Rastafarianism.
2. The role of Reggae as disseminator of the movement to youths in Britain.
3. The subjective experiences of blacks in an objectively racist society.

1. <u>The Emergence and Development of Rastafarianism</u>

Ivor Morrish, commenting on Rastafarianism in his forthcoming book, insists that "such a disparate and heterogeneous movement as this is not easily classified or delineated by some preconceived typology". Although this is substantially correct, it would seem that millenarianism is the conceptual model into which Rastafarianism fits more easily. Millennial movements often incorporate various functions - psychological, social, political and religious - all of which may be identified within the general rubric of the Rastas. Also, as with all millennial movements, Rastafarianism places emphasis on an apocalyptic future - the Day of Deliverance. The most

widely accepted definition of a millennial movement is Peter Worsley's, who wrote:

> I use the term 'millenarian' to describe those movements in which there is an expectation of, and preparation for, the coming of a period of supernatural bliss. I do not narrowly confine this term to the classical belief that the period will be 1,000 years. The term, in my use, includes both those movements which anticipate that the millenium will occur solely as a result of supernatural intervention and those that envisage that the actions of human beings will be necessary.

Of course, millenial movements such as Rastafarianism do not suddenly appear. Firstly, there must be general discatisfaction amongst a segment of the population with their social situation. This obviously increases their attraction towards a movement which promises an improvement in conditions after the Day of Deliverance. Secondly there must be some crucial event, or series of events, at a given time to precipitate the formation of a millennial movement. To consider both these generative forces it is necessary to examine the general situation of the blacks in Jamaica and, in particular, during the 1920s and 1930s.

Jamaica supports a social structure which remains rigidly divided along a class-colour correlation, reflecting a 'white-bias'. The legacy of the plantocracy is still prevalent as white and brown skins have combined to form the Jamaican middle class. So, as Ruth Glass rightly observes, "in Jamaica, prosperity still has a light skin however varied in shade" (1962: 25). Consequently, the blacks form the base of both the economic and occupational pyramids and pursue an existence in which abject poverty almost invariably determines their life style. In West Kingston where Rastafarianism and other previous millennial movements receives its greatest support this condition is endemic. Inevitably, the most arresting features of this area are unemployment and crime and the dwellers get by mainly through 'living on the dungle' - being almost totally dependent on the city's refuse dumps for food and other essentials. Another strategy developed by the West Kingston dwellers is 'scuffling' which involves any form of odd job which will keep the dwellers alive. This experience of degradation is made more apparent to the blacks by the ostentatious displays of wealth which, in physical terms at least, are so near to their own material deprivation. The migration into Kingston from other parts of the island during the development of the city during the 1940s and 1950s only made the disparity between the living conditions of blacks and whites even more acute. A graphic

portrayal of this situation is presented by Ruth Glass:

> The top groups have climbed up to the new suburbs strung along the ranges of the hills. Down below, the dreadful shack dumps of West Kingston have become darker, denser, larger. Brand new gleaming roads and houses, furniture, refrigerators, large cars - that is the picture of Mona Heights ... In and around Kingston Pen ... there are flimsy miserable huts thrown together, made of refuse - paper, cardboard, packing cases, bits of sticks and parts of discarded motor car bodies. (1962: 26)

Without doubt, the deprivation experienced by the black masses, accentuated by the proximity of wealth in Kingston, has increased the attractiveness of the emergent millennial and religious cults in areas such as West Kingston. According to Simpson's studies of the area during the 1950s, Rastafarianism, like Native Baptists, Revivalists, Cumina and Convince before, became "another outlet for pent-up emotions" (1962: 64). Whilst this is no longer the only role of the Rasta movement it remains a very important one.

These then are the prevailing conditions which, both historically and currently, confront a significant majority of black Jamaicans. The period spanning the late 1920s - 1930s was in particular a time of "stress" for these masses. It was a period characterised by adverse climatic conditions and an economic depression. Indeed, the distress over the low wages prevalent on the island culminated in the outbreak of violent labour disturbances in the Westmoreland region of the island.

It was within this period of "harsh times" that Marcus Garvey, himself a black Jamaican, made his greatest impact on the black indigenous population. Although he experienced less success in Jamaica than in America in converting blacks to his philosophy, he nevertheless provided the inspirational springboard for Rastafarianism. At this point we can look briefly at his movement and philosophy.

Either explicitly or implicitly, Marcus Garvey provided Rastafarianism with its two central beliefs - repatriation to Africa and the divinity of Haile Selassie I. His philosophy, Garveyism, was based primarily on the belief in the independence of races and the promotion of race pride. It was a philosophy which was formulated after reading Up From Slavery, the principal work of his major adversary, Booker T. Washington - an integrationist. On completing the reading of the book, Garvey felt compelled to ask himself the following questions :

> Where is the black man's Government? Where is his King and his army, navy, his men of big affairs?
> (Garvey 1969: 126)

Unable to find adequate answers to these questions, Garvey set about the messianic task of uniting Negroes into "one great body" and establishing for them a country and government. This he hoped to achieve through his movement, United Negroes Improvement Association (UNAI) which at its peak attracted a membership of two million - drawn mainly from the lower strata of the American and Jamaican societies. The aims of UNIA were typified in the movement's slogan: "ONE GOD, ONE AIM, ONE DESTINY" and the prime objective, racial autonomy, was reinforced by the adoption of a separate flag comprising the colours red, black and green. These respectively symbolised the blood shed by the race, pride in the Negro's colour and the promise of improvement in conditions after repatriation.

Garvey initiated various schemes which he hoped would help him achieve his principal aims; these included the formation of an independent shipping line (Black Star Line) and negotiations with the Liberian Government for land to be set aside for the repatriation of Jamaican and American blacks. However, although as Vincent comments, Garvey did "more than anyone else to stimulate race pride" (1971), his efforts at repatriation failed.

Garvey's directive to his followers to "look to Africa when a black King shall be crowned for the Day of Deliverance is near" may be seen as the basis of the Rastafarians' deification of Haile Selassie I. The coronation of Selassie (Prince Ras Tafari) as Emperor of Ethiopia in November 1930 persuaded many of Garvey's supporters in Jamaica of the validity of his prophecies. Ironically, Garvey himself felt contempt for Selassie, particularly after the Emperor had capitulated to Mussolini during the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935.

Confirmation of the prophecy was to be found through careful investigation of the bible. It was a process legitimated within the bible itself; in John 5: 39 the reader is directed to "search the scriptures" because "in them you have eternal life and it is they that bear witness to me". The Rastafarians were quick to identify this passage as justification for their selective use of the scriptures. Further scrutiny provided the Rastas with sufficient proof of Selassie's divinity. Passages were located and interpreted in such a way that the coronation of the Emperor was accurately described (Revelation 5: 2) and his ancestral lineage traced back to the House of David (Revelation 5: 5). The divinity of Haile Selassie and his identification as the Living God were endorsed by selected verses of Psalm 68: 4, Revelations 19: 16, and Daniel 7: 9.

The relationship between Garvey and the Rastafarians during the formative period of the movement remains obscure. However, after the failure of UNIA Garvey retreated to Britain in the late 1930s where he died a sad and neglected death. The absence of any central figure to direct the development of Rastafarianism provided the opportunity for a number of followers to become self-appointed leaders. Among those who emerged during these early years were Joseph Hibbert, Messiah H. Archibald Dunkley and Leonard P. Howell. Without doubt, it was Howell who made the most lasting impact on the movement.

In 1934 Howell was arrested on charges of sedition for selling 5,000 post-card size photographs of Selassie on the false premise that they were passports to Ethiopia. On his release from jail he established an organisation at Pinnacle - an abandoned estate. It was on the estate that Howell and his followers began plaiting their hair - the recognisable dreadlocks of the Rastaman. According to some sources this style imitated the Niyamen, a Ugandan tribe who plaited their hair in order to create a more ferocious impression. At the time it was widely reported in the Jamaican press that Selassie had assumed the leadership of this organisation, although these claims were never fully substantiated. An alternative explanation for the development of the dreadlocks fashion is that the Pinnacle community used the bible as their primary source; the crucial passage being Numbers 6, Verse 5:

> All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy; he shall let the locks on his head grow long.

The Pinnacle community also found sufficient justification in selected verses of Genesis for the use of ganja (marijuana) and soon began cultivating the plant on their estate. The use of "the 'erb" has since become ubiquitous amongst Rastafarians. Sheila Kitzinger, during a stay with a Rastafarian community, observed how ganja was used as a green vegetable, in tea, for medicinal purposes and for burning during groundations (Rastafarian meetings). Insisting that ganja is a drug of habituation rather than addiction, one of the Rasta brethren told Kitzinger that Rastas "smoke it to induce a state of euphoria" (1966/7: 34).

The growth of locks, the cultivation of ganja and the notoriety of their leader combined to make the Pinnacle community the target for frequent police raids until its dissolution in 1954. More importantly, the life style of the community was generalised by the wider Jamaican society to the

Rastafarian movement in toto. The impression that Rastafarians were comprised primarily of criminals and political deviants was consolidated by the infiltration of a criminal fringe into the movement - the locks and beards providing them with convenient cover. The revered position of ganja in the Rastafarian philosophy of life enhanced their disreputable image in Jamaica. Yet the Rastas have refused to comply with the state laws which prohibit the cultivation and use of "the 'erb". Rastas argue that they recognise no law other than the bible.

The threatening appearance of the locksmen and their habitual use of apocalyptic language (derived from the Old Testament), created the ominous portent that this verbal violence would soon be transformed into actual physical violence. These fears were apparently confirmed, firstly by the invasion of Kingston by locksmen in 1955, and then by the accusation some years later that some Rastamen were involved in conspiratorial alliance with Dr Castro aimed at the overthrow of the island by communists. The immediate consequence of these incidents was a perceptible change in Jamaicans' reactions to the Rastas. Periodic excursions by Rasta brethren to Kingston pierheads in anticipation of ships which would deliver them to Zion could be tolerated by Jamaican society. However, the detection of political revolutionaries within the ranks of the movement provided a totally different impression. Katrin Norris commented on this change in attitude:

> Whereas it (the Rasta movement) had previously been an object of amused scorn, it was now regarded for the first time as a serious threat to the island's security. (1962: 50)

Neither were the Rastas themselves insensitive to this change. Consequently prominent Rasta brethren requested that an objective survey be carried out by the University of the West Indies into the movement. It was hoped that such a survey would present an accurate portrayal of the doctrinal position of the movement.

The authors of the survey, Smith, Augier and Nettleford, spent a fortnight with various Rastafarian communities and emphasised the passivity of the movement and the desire of its members to improve their squalid living conditions by emigrating to Africa. Among the many recommendations made by the team to the Government was that a mission should be sent to Africa to arrange for the immigration of Rastafarians. Whilst this delegation was welcomed by five African governments, each emphasised their willingness to accept only artisans from Jamaica who could contribute to the country's economy. The reluctance of these countries to accept an indiscriminate

number of Rastafarians contributed to the relatively low number of actual migrants.

Since the publication of the report in 1960 Rastafarianism has undergone significant changes in the interpretation of its philosophy. The injection of middle class support, mainly from Jamaican students, has meant that a more political philosophy has evolved with Rastafarians participating in elections and influencing governmental policies. Rehabilitation has thus taken over from repatriation as the principal aim for many Rastafarians. As Rex Nettleford, one of the authors of the 1960 report, commented:

> Over the decade, many Rastafarian brethren have resolved the ideological conflict and have emerged with a concept of 'Africanisation' of Jamaica. Just as the Kingdom of Heaven is within you (instead of somewhere in the clouds) Africa is in Jamaica, goes the reasoning. Some argue that Jamaica <u>is</u> Africa. (1970: 101)

Quite obviously the most crucial function of the movement has been the provision of a positive and viable identity. Unlike the other West Kingston religious cults, Blackness is deified in Rastafarian beliefs and is being constantly reinforced through the use of exclusive language and the wearing of particular hair and clothe styles. It is this sense of communality - "we-feeling" - which is of greatest importance.

2. <u>Reggae and Rastafarianism</u>

> Reggae was not conceived in a vacuum or a conceptual negative, but from a sociological, political and cultural situation that forced a possible physical and revolutionary position into a cultural one, of music. (Kallyndyr and Dalrymple 1974: 13)

Within the traditions of contemporary Jamaican music, such as Ska and Rocksteady, the term Reggae was initially used to denote a particular dance style. This somewhat limited application of the term was, however, soon abandoned in favour of a more general use and 'Reggae' gained acceptance as a synonym for all contemporary Jamaican music. Both the origins of the word and the precise date of its emergence remains obscure. Nevertheless, one of its first appearances was on the record, <u>Do the Reggay</u>, which was released in 1968 and performed by Toots and the Maytals. Its introduction therefore followed the pattern established by both Ska and Rocksteady which had similarly been introduced as new dance styles; their first appearance being respectively <u>Everybody Ska</u> (Prince Buster) and <u>Do the Rocksteady</u> (Alton Ellis).

Like its immediate musical predecessors Reggae was identified with the urban youth situated in the shanty towns surrounding Kingston. Indeed, the new musical forms signified the youths' deliberate and conscious revolt against Calypso music. Until then, Calypso (or mento as the Jamaican form is called) had been the dominant musical force on the island. Yet it no longer had relevance to the immediate situation of these youths as its lyrics almost invariably reflected life in the rural areas of the island.

A characteristic shared by Ska, Rocksteady and Reggae has been their lyrical concern with current events involving Kingston youth. Ska and Rocksteady, which were the major musical forms in Jamaica during most of the 1960s, reflected the phenomenon of the Rude Boys or 'Rudies' as they came to be known. The Rude Boys were inspired by and imitated the American anti-hero who received extensive coverage on the American-dominated media of the island. The principal source of identification was the cinema, and through this medium the Rudies adopted and glorified the fashions, life styles and names of such notorieties as Al Capone, Dillinger, Jesse James and Humphrey Bogart. The music was quick to respond to this trend and both artists and records mirrored these aspects of the Rudie life style through such songs as Al Capone, Return of Django, Clint Eastwood and 007.

The Rudie life style developed to incorporate a significant majority of the black, lower class youth of the Kingston shanty towns and an integral aspect of the sub-culture was violence - the assertion of the male machismo. Garth White, a contemporary observer of the Rudies, presented this description of them in 1965:

> Rude bwoy is that person, native who is totally disenchanted with the ruling systems; who is generally descended from the African elements in the lower class and who is now armed with ratchets (German made knives), other cutting instruments and with increasing frequency nowadays, with guns and explosives. (1965: 39)

Inevitably this life style brought the Rude Boys into regular confrontation with the Jamaican authorities and these were fully documented in the lyrics of both Ska and Rocksteady. To express their disdain for the authorities ("the oppressor") the lyricists created a parody figure, Judge Dread, who featured in numerous Ska songs.

A constant but still relatively minor theme in the Jamaican music of the period was Rastafarianism. Its beliefs, intellectual progenitor (Garvey) and its ambitions all featured in the lyrics of Reco Rodriques and Don 'de lion' Drummond - two of the most prominent Ska musicians. Drummond was in fact a Rastaman (his nickname deriving from Selassie's title) whose compositions included Beardman Ska, Addis Ababa and Marcus Garvey. There are further examples of the Rasta influence; groups emerged in this period with names such as 'The Abyssinians' and 'The Ethiopians' and songs constructed around Rasta imagery including John Holt's Sings For I and Glen's Jordan River. Nevertheless, it was the American inspired Rudies and their activities which dominated the lyrics of Ska and Rocksteady.

During the late 1960s a significant proportion of the Rudies were becoming absorbed into the Rastafarian movement as the latter began resolving its ambivalent attitude towards Jamaica in favour of creating 'Ethiopia' in 'Babylon'. This absorption process paralleled important developments in Jamaican contemporary music; by this time Reggae had emerged and succeeded Ska and Rocksteady as the pre-eminent musical force on the island. Thus America no longer provided the main reference for the life style, and therefore lyrical themes of the Kingston youth. Rastafarianism and the despair and oppression of black Jamaicans became the dominant concern of Reggae music.

The complex interaction between, on the one hand, the former Rudies who advocated a secular and political programme of reform and, on the other, the older Rastafarians who continued to follow a philosophy of religious escapism, was reflected and expressed in Reggae. Linton Kwesi Johnson, in his analysis of the impact of Rasta on Reggae identifies three dominant perspectives which have been articulated through Reggae lyrics (1976). Firstly there is the 'Propagandist' who is critical of the black Jamaican masses and argues that they should be responsive to the schemes initiated by Manley (the Prime Minister) and his government, to improve literary and educational standards. The most representative example of this stance is Better Must Come which was used by Manley's party, People's National Party (PNP) during the 1972 General Election. In contrast there is the stance adopted by the 'Culturalist' who argues against accepting these schemes. His lyrics reflect the consciousness of those blacks whose experiences are rooted in oppression. Thus he insists that the covert aim of these governmental schemes is to maintain the status quo in the Jamaican social structure. Johnson quotes Peter Tosh's You Can't Blame the Youth as typical of the culturalist perspective. In this song

Tosh suggests that youths cannot be blamed for engaging in criminal activities when throughout their lives they have been mis-educated, i.e. given a colonialist education which will render him content with his position in the pool of reserved labour. The third and final category identified by Johnson is the 'Political Culturalist' who argues that what has taken place in contemporary Jamaica represents the actual fulfilment of Garvey's prophecies. Abject poverty, political oppression and endemic 'sufferation' for the black Jamaican are seen as confirmation of Garvey's claim that independence for the black race and the establishment of a Homeland in Africa are the only ways in which this degradation can be alleviated. The 'Political Culturalist' perspective can be identified in the music of Burning Spear and particularly in their recent L.P. Marcus Garvey. During the title track Burning Spear insist:

> Marcus Garvey's words come to pass,
> Marcus Garvey's words come to pass,
> Can't get no food to eat,
> Can't get no money to spend ...
>
> Marcus Garvey: Burning Spear, 1977.

Johnson's analysis of the contrasting Rastafarian perspectives which inform Reggae lyrics is very helpful in identifying the diverse elements and interpretations currently contained within the movement. However, the lyrics also reflect some very standard Rastafarian imagery which is employed by most Reggae artists committed to the movement. The most notable example of this is the common use of apocalyptic themes which are often expressed through vivid allusions to 'fire'. Thus, recent years have seen the release of Reggae songs with the following titles: Fire is My Desire; Fire, Fire; Blood and Fire and Brimstone and Fire. With the recent injection of finance into Reggae music by major record companies such as Island and Virgin there has been opportunities for artists to exploit this theme even further by augmenting the lyrical imagery with appropriate sound effects. Nowhere has this been more effectively employed than on the Peter Tosh song, Igziabehere: Let Jah Be Praised.

Without doubt, the most important propagandist of the Rastafarian movement has been Bob Marley who through substantial record sales has received international recognition. Further, his open committment to the Rastafarians has stimulated intense interest in the movement amongst his record buying public. His position within Johnson's typology is difficult to determine as he appears to oscillate between each of the three perspectives.

Indicative perhaps of his current position was his contribution to the PNP during the 1976 General Election in Jamaica when he provided Michael Manley, the leader of the PNP, with the song Smile Jamaica which was soon adopted as the party's anthem. Because of his supposed involvement with internal politics Marley was the victim of an assassination attempt but recovered in time to perform with his group, The Wailers, at a free open air concert in Kingston in support of the PNP.

Amongst black youth in this country, Marley is generally considered to be the vanguard of the Rastafarian movement. It is the lyrics which have appeared on his L.Ps - particularly Rastaman Vibration - which have prompted the youths' interest in the movement and provided the starting point for more searching examinations of Rasta history and philosophy. However, his impact cannot be seen in isolation. Rastafarianism, however defined, demands some element of change in the existing circumstances of blacks. It has already been shown how in Jamaica this desire for radical changes in the economic and political situation of the black masses is both well-founded and necessary. With abject poverty and unemployment endemic amongst this segment of the population, the possibility of change (however remote) and the alleviation of their actual disadvantages remains their only hope - their principal reason for existing. Yet for Rastafarianism to make a similarly profound impact on black youths in this country there must exist a comparable desire for change in their social situation. We may consider racism in Britain and its effects upon the lives of these youths as critical in increasing their attraction towards the Rastafarian movement.

3. Racism in Britain

The presence of a coloured population in Britain since 1948 has often been conveniently identified as the root cause for discrimination against racial minorities which currently takes place in this country. Because of Britain's self-image as a racially tolerant society it is reluctant to recognise that racism, in this country, has a long history. The racialist practices which can now be identified in employment (Ballard and Holden 1975: Smith 1977), housing (Rex and Moore 1967: Smith 1977) and education (Coard 1971) extend from the deeply entrenched belief in Britain of the inferiority of aliens - particularly blacks. This feature of British society was recognised as early as 1475 when Milan's Ambassador wrote to his Duke in Burgundy that "the English are a proud race who respect nobody and claim

a superiority over all other nations" (Johnson 1975: 164). It was a characteristic also recognised and commented on by Josiah Wedgwood M.P. Speaking in a parliamentary debate on the proposed extension of the Aliens Restriction Act Wedgwood pointed out that immigrants in this country had been constantly harassed and that the proposed extension, to restrict Jewish immigration, would be consistent with this historical trend. He continued:

> Generally speaking, aliens are always hated by people in this country. Usually speaking there has been a mob which has been opposed to them, but that mob has always had leaders in high places. The Flemings were persecuted and hunted, and the Lombards were hunted down by the London mob. Then it was the turn of the French Protestants. I think the same holds good on the subject today. (Foot 1965: 106)

And of course today in 1978. Once the variable of 'colour' is added, this "British sense of superiority" and "hatred" of aliens becomes even more pronounced. The negative connotation of black in the symbolic imagery of the bible and the English language both perpetuates and reinforces this attitude. By 1596 this racist stamp on the culture had become so deeply embedded that Queen Elizabeth I insisted that the importation of black slaves to this country should cease immediately. In a letter circulated to the country's principal mayors she expressed her concern at the "number of blackamoores brought into these realms of which kind there are already too many" (Walvin 1971: 12).

That the migration of coloured peoples to Britain since 1948 has caused racial discrimination in this country is then a MYTH. Dilip Hiro has provided the most accurate estimation of what this migration has produced. He writes, "the settlement of coloured colonials in Britain has brought to the surface the submerged historical prejudices of the British" (1973: 276).

What then is the extent of discrimination which confronts the black in Britain in the areas outlined above? In education of course this is particularly difficult to determine. Nevertheless, no research has yet emerged which conclusively refutes the assumptions of Bernard Coard who identified a trend towards a disproportionately high number of black pupils in ESN schools. He commented:

> The black child labours under three crucial handicaps:
> (1) low expectations on his part about his likely performance in a white-controlled system of education;
> (2) low motivation to succeed academically because he feels the cards are stacked against him; and finally
> (3) low teacher expectations which affect the amount of effort expended on his behalf by the teacher and also affect his own image of himself and his abilities.
> (1971: 25)

These problems are compounded by the prevalence of school curricula which have failed to make the adjustments necessary to accommodate pupils from multi-racial backgrounds. Textbooks and children's literature continue to communicate both a limited and ethnocentric image of the world (Laishley 1975: Dixon 1977), and contribute to the progressive devaluation of the black identity.

The most comprehensive investigations into racialist practices in the fields of employment and housing have been carried out by the Political and Economic Planning Research Institute (PEP) in two separate series of reports. The first was carried out in 1966 before the passing of the 1968 Race Relations Act. This showed the incidence of discrimination in Britain to be substantial and which, under the terms of the new Act, would be made unlawful. In employment this report showed quite clearly how racialist practices operated not only in the recruitment of coloured workers, but also in the limited internal promotion opportunities made available to them. So, even when accepted into a particular firm's labour force, coloured workers are likely to occupy the positions at the lower level of the occupation structure. The authors of the study found that this was due to race and not to differences in skills, experience or qualifications. In its investigation into the housing opportunities available for racial minorities, the PEP examined both private and public sectors and included private rented accommodation, council housing and the purchase of private houses. The authors found that the availability of accommodation was related directly to the colour of the applicant. It was the black applicant, rather than the white or East European, who confronted the greatest problems in obtaining accommodation of any form (Daniel 1968).

Since the first PEP report appeared in 1967, the Race Relations Act of 1968 has been passed. Nevertheless the recent investigations conducted by PEP between 1972-1975 found similar patterns of differential access to housing and discriminatory policies operating in employment. Although

there is some indication in the reports that the actual incidence of discrimination in these fields of inquiry has declined since 1966 (Smith 1977), this is no cause for the CRC/CRE to give self-congratulatory pats on the back. It is likely that the most profound effect of the 1968 (and 1976) Act has been to increase the likelihood of covert racialism.

These then are some of the problems which face black youths in our society. Even if the youths succeed in an educational system which, either implicitly or explicitly, places them at a disadvantage, they are likely to confront similar forms of racialism in the white collar occupations (Ballard and Holden 1975). So the vicious circle of deprivation goes on; unemployment (or lack of suitable employment) means living in the run-down areas of the city where schools contain poor resources and a proportionately higher turnover of staff. Many of these youths have already experienced this 'multiple deprivation syndrome' coming from families who encountered racial discrimination since their settlement in Britain.

It is within this context that the attraction of Rastafarianism to these youths needs to be considered. For them, the Rasta movement signifies the only tenable alternative to their continued disadvantaged position in Britain. Rasta equals freedom from discrimination; Rasta is the only reference point in a racist society which gives positive reinforcement to the black identity.

Of course not all black youths wish to take up the option of Rasta. Some either fail or do not wish to recognise the existence of racism in contemporary Britain. Others do not define their Blackness as a salient feature of their social identity, preferring instead to promote other aspects such as their sporting or academic achievements. For these youths, Rasta and what it symbolises is irrelevant. For others Rasta is crucial in structuring their perspectives on life in Britain; it is particularly important amongst those youths in the 18-25 age group. It is this group which has experienced at first hand the impact of racialism. It is they who, perhaps for the first time, realise the depressed status occupied by blacks in Britain. Rasta provides them with the belief that their 'dole-queue existence' is not permanent; a suggestion that they won't always be spending their time hanging around on the streets, being picked up on 'suss' by the police. Rasta, then, is hope.

4. As They See It

The youths I spoke to during the course of the research had not yet reached the crucial 18-25 age bracket, and as some of them actually admitted Rasta had not yet made such a significant impact on their lives. Tony, for instance, said:

> Well yeah, I believe in it. It's there but I can't really act like them because I'm not their age and I've got to act different. I've got to come to school and to learn. They're about 19-20 or older.

These youths were selected from the fifth forms of four secondary schools in the East Midlands and North London and were therefore aged between 15-16. Their knowledge of the Rastafarian movement was varied; some had a very comprehensive knowledge of its history and central beliefs, whilst others were much less well informed. Perhaps Graham was the most aware and articulate about Rasta. He commented:

> Rastas worship Haile Selassie, a man who died. They call him Lord of Lords, King of Kings and they have the traffic light colours of Ethiopia - the Rasta colours. Red is for the blood, yellow is for the sun and green is for the land. They locks up their hair to show their beliefs. Ethiopia is the home of all Rastamen.

Many of the youths had only the barest knowledge of the Rastas; Junior, for instance, knew little more than the fact that "Haile Selassie is their God and they call him Jah", whilst Robert stated that the Rastas "believe in not combing, cutting their hair - like Samson. They'll lose their purity if they cut or comb it". Similarly Frank offered this piece of fragmentary knowledge: "They believe in no drinking, no wars. Their God is supposed to be black".

Invariably their principal source of information about the Rastafarians was Reggae. Although discussion with local Rastamen at the Sound Systems, Community Club and record shops had supplemented this information, it was Reggae which was the main transmitter of the movement's beliefs and history; the youths' initial contact with Rasta. For a significant number of the youths the lyrics of Reggae were considered to be the most important component of the song - more important than either the music or overall structure of the song. Listening to Reggae was not a passive activity for them; to understand Reggae it was necessary to understand the lyrics.

David told me that "I listen to all the words - you just got to", and Stephen amplified these sentiments:

> When the record's playing you are not really supposed to listen to the beat, you're supposed to listen to the words they're saying. In some of the songs it tells you about Ethiopia and Rasta and in some it tells you about the police and the Rasta and how they argue, how they go round trying to make the Rastas cut their hair.

James also emphasised the critical importance of lyrics in Reggae:

> The words are about Jah and their God and their spliff (Marijuana cigarette) and slavery. All sorts of things prophecised by Marcus Garvey. They put them into words and then into music. And you have to understand what they're talking about because if you listen to a record and you don't know who Marcus Garvey was, then it's not really worth listening to.

Of all the Reggae artists these youths listen to it is undoubtedly Bob Marley who is held in the highest esteem. Adrian remarked that "I like the reasons for his singing - his religion", whilst Ian suggested that Marley was one of the more sincere Rastamen currently involved in Reggae. He continued:

> Bob Marley's a religious singer, he sings about God. He's one of the truest out of the Rasta people. What he talks about is true. He's just trying to start a sort of debate.

But of course Marley is not the only Rastafarian involved in producing and performing Reggae. Leroy told me:

> They (the Reggae artists) are looksed up Dreads and believe in Haile Selassie. Their natural aim is to go back to Ethiopia because that is their Heaven. So mostly these people sing about Jah, which means God; this is Haile Selassie to them. So most of the records have got that feature.

The Rastafarian influence on Reggae lyrics has implications also beyond merely introducing the youths to the central beliefs and development of the movement. The Rasta concern with articulating the continued "sufferation" and oppression of blacks has provided the youths with a more penetrative insight into their own history and culture. It therefore fulfils an important educational function. According to many of the youths

the information presented about blacks in their schools is restricted almost exclusively to the experience of slavery. Dick elaborated upon this:

> In history I've never seen nobody do anything about black men. Only slavery when they pile them in ships and take them to the West Indies to do sugar business. The records help me learn things. You get records that are telling you a story - telling you the facts. Like the Rasta records - they're learning you something.

The notorious reputation which the Rastafarians acquired in Jamaica remains firmly entrenched in the consciousness of these youths' parents. Indeed, the youths indicated that parental hostility towards the Rastas was a major deterrent against their actual commitment to the movement. Furthermore, this animosity is often accentuated by the parents' own religious convictions; a significant number of them were Pentecostalists and the youths found these two sets of beliefs irreconcilable. So, for the meantime at least, they were adhering closer to their parents beliefs. Parents, the youths said, thought that the Rastas were "bad" or as Wilbert said, "sick in the head". Generally this opinion extended to the music which, as we have seen, features Rastafarian beliefs most prominently. Eugene, for instance, told me that "my dad don't like to hear the Rastas sing; he's a Seventh Day Adventist". Leroy's mother, on the other hand, could tolerate the music but not the performers. He told me:

> Mum thinks the music's good but the people singing it look bad. She don't like to see coloured people projected in that style. She likes them looking neat and tidy.

Other youths said that their parents considered the Rastas to be lazy because most of them were currently out of work. According to the youths the unemployment amongst the Rastas in their areas was due overwhelmingly to their appearance:

> All the Rasta boys are out of work. Because the bosses aren't prepared to take on boys with their hair like that. But it's what they believe in.
> (Wilbert)

> As I live in England I wouldn't have locks. If I was older and lived in the West Indies I would. In England if I had locks it would be harder for me to get around and get jobs. (Trevor)

The youths also thought that unemployment meant both a boring and monotonous existence for the Rastas:

> Most of the Rastas are unemployed. They go to the Community Centre every day and then to a club for the unemployed. (Carey)

> Most of the Rastas here are unemployed. Most of the time they're in the Community Centre or W... Hall. They must be bloody bored. (Steven)

Conclusion

Rastafarianism is essentially a movement of withdrawal and must therefore be doomed to failure. In Britain it exists in total isolation with its members unwilling to participate in the political affairs of the country. Instead, through frequent bible meetings and other social events, it concentrates on enhancing the "we-feeling" between the Rasta brethren. Consequently the movement is becoming progressively more alienated from the mainstream of the society. Yet the rationale for this 'isolationist' policy is overtly apparent when one considers the nature of racism in Britain. Racist ideology in this country is characterised by two features which have elevated it to normative status. Firstly it is an ideology which is historically entrenched in the society's values. Secondly it receives support, either implicitly or explicitly, from a substantial majority of the white indigenous population.

The aims of the Rastafarian movement then are critically opposed to those of any other major political party in Britain. Unlike these movements, the Rastas are concerned with promoting the positive aspects of the Black identity and with upsetting the existing power relationship between blacks and whites; this necessarily precludes any potential political alliances. Whites, regardless of their political affiliations, cannot understand the subjective experiences of blacks in a racist society. It is a situation which Delroy Washington commented on in his song, BROTHERS IN TROUBLE.

> You're on the outside looking in,
> You think you are seeing but
> Your vision is dim.
> Brothers in trouble,
> Can't find no job,
> Pressure is on them
> So they got to rob.
>
> (BROTHERS IN TROUBLE : Delroy Washington 1977)

With racism and Reggae, then, Rastafarianism forms a critical interaction in the lives of many black youths in Britain. These youths are unwilling to accept the form of inferior status imposed on their parents. The movement's beliefs and philosophy are being transmitted to the youths primarily through Reggae lyrics and are helping to structure their response to racism:

> I don't like people who's prejudiced against blacks. Prince Jazzbo talked of this in Bagga Wolf and that people should stand up. I agree. (Andrew)
>
> Prejudice; it's no good wanting to go back there to the West Indies. We've got to stand up and fight here like Bob Marley says. (Calvin)

The research from which this booklet derives shows quite clearly that Rastafarianism was making its most profound impact upon black youths in the lower streams. This is to be expected, as it is this group of youths which is most likely to face unemployment and other forms of normative racism in Britain when they leave school (Troyna 1977; and 1978). Yet the political insights of these youths, their knowledge about Reggae, their interest in the development of Rastafarianism and, most important, their ability to coherently articulate their opinions about these topics suggest that this whole subject area should be harnessed in the multi-racial school. To reject or react angrily to the youths' professed commitment to Rasta or insist on the removal of locks or tams (woolly hats) would merely increase their pre-existing hostility towards white society and precipitate their withdrawal into this alternative sub-culture. The inherent contradictions of the Rastafarian belief system could be systematically discussed and analysed during Social Studies, History, and Humanities lessons - not as a means of dissuading the youths from their commitment, but to supplement the information which they have already gained from Reggae lyrics. Rastafarianism could similarly be integrated into Religious Education syllabuses where the selective use of biblical passages could be examined and the religion, in general, compared to other religious sects such as Pentecostalism and the Jehovah's Witness.

Rastafarianism is almost indefinable; as Bob Marley recently sang it is just a "Natural Mystic" which is flowing through the air. Yet its beliefs are gaining progressively more acceptance amongst black youths in this country. To show indifference or hostility towards this trend would further the gap already existing between these youths and the white members of our multi-racial society.

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